

FARM FORESTRY



John Woodley

Farm forestry is an under-utilised concept

JOHAN WOODLEY believes that Farm Forestry is in its infancy in Australia and following the New Zealand model has the potential to grow and provide a timber resource to the Australian timber industry.

“This is a vastly under-rated opportunity and we have the land to grow the trees and the expertise to manage for high value end product,” he says.

He believes that most farms could put up to 20% of the land area under trees without compromising agriculture production.

Woodley is eminently qualified to comment having been in the silviculture game for more than 30 years.

Back in 1981 he started pine pruning in Marlborough, New Zealand, soon after arriving back from 500ccGP motorcycle racing in Europe. At that point he was a five times New Zealand motorcycle road race champion and three times winner of the Australian 500cc Grand Prix at Bathurst.

Between 1982 and 1985 he ran a successful silviculture business in the Nelson district of New Zealand servicing both the New Zealand Forest Service and private growers, planting pruning and thinning to waste radiata pine.

In 1986 he had a brief period of felling for a pine logging crew before building some town houses and flats in Motueka.

In 1987 He moved his family to Australia and started work in the Alpine logging of native forests in the North East of Victoria around MittaMitta and then Corryong. The species being harvested were eucalyptus delagatensis or alpine ash and eucalyptus rubida or candlebark gum.

In 1988 when the mill the logging crew he was working for closed in Swifts creek, the logging crew moved to the North Central logging area around Marysville and Alexandra

and he spent the next 14 years felling, crosscutting and log grading mostly eucalypt regnans or mountain ash, alpine ash, shining gum and messmate.

In 1997 during the logging off season he got involved with the establishment of the Government-sponsored FFORNE scheme which was a three year scheme to encourage farmers to plant and manage hardwood plantations for sawlogs.

Because of his New Zealand experience in silviculture he was well placed to step back in to silviculture, planting and managing these eucalypt plantations and in fact he employed two people on silviculture full time for the next six years until he retired from logging and took up full time silviculture.

In 1994 John bought a 100 acre property near Taggerty which was central to the logging areas he was working in.

His intention was to set up a demonstration agroforestry farm to show how farmers could use trees on farms for shelter from cold winter winds, shade from hot summer sun and timber.

He wanted to show how native timber sawlogs could be successfully grown on farms, show how an on-farm superannuation scheme could be created with the added benefits of shade and shelter for farm animals which would ultimately lead to happier animals and increased production.

“What started as a run down and degraded cattle grazing property has grown into a remarkable and well tree’d property with a broad range of Australian native timber trees, native understorey shrubs for amenity and shelter, and also exotic trees both pines and other softwoods as well as a range of exotic hardwoods,” says John.

Currently he is fencing up the 16 year old pine plantation ready for agisting heifers for a beef operation based in Yea.

He is also developing the property into an Arboretum with the expectation that the broad range of established trees will be complimented by further plantings of both native and exotic trees from Australia and around the world. Ultimately he plans to open the property to the public but for the next few years the property will be available by invitation only.

Woodley has been hosting groups of carpentry and wood working students to demonstrate how timber trees are managed to produce high quality timber, and during these visits he demonstrates pruning techniques, and sawmilling of logs for timber. This is a growing side of the business.

There is an association with Holmesglen TAFE and as well as student visits he has established and manages a 20 hectare agroforestry planting at Ramleigh Park, Snobs Creek. Ramleigh is the Holmesglen TAFE rural learning campus.

As well as servicing silviculture clients in Victoria as far ranging as Hamilton in the Western districts and Stanley in the North East, he has established and managed forestry joint ventures on other people’s land and he holds an interest in the tree crop.

He is the director of Silviculture Services Australia Pty Ltd which trades as Farm Forestry Services, director of Treelot Company which is a forestry investment company set up by John and Paul Montgomery to provide well managed small scale forestry investments. He is also director of the John Woodley Family Trust which he plans to develop as an altruistic trust as a charitable organisation for future contributions to various welfare related causes.

Woodley recently was invited to attend and present at the New Zealand Farm Forestry Association’s annual conference in Balclutha.



Eucalypts



How to do it right: Site quality